

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07

LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 PA-01 PRS-01 USIA-06 CU-02 SS-15

NSC-05 SP-02 OMB-01 DODE-00 /075 W

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R 141704Z MAY 76

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2774

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 3480

E.O.: 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, ELAB, TS

SUBJ: STRIKES TAPER OFF, RECRIMINATIONS BEGIN IN EARNEST

REF : TUNIS 3339

1. SUMMARY: FOLLOWING NORMAL PATTERN FOR LABOR DISPUTES IN TUNISIA, STRIKES THAT ERUPTED LAST WEEK AND EARLY THIS WEEK ENDED AFTER DAY OR TWO. NO NEW MAJOR STRIKES HAVE OCCURRED AND TUNIS HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. MEANWHILE, GOT LEADERSHIP HAS BEGUN TO FACE PROBLEM AND ASSIGN BLAME. ONLY PUBLIC ACTION SO FAR HAS BEEN TO EXPRESS SATISFACTION WITH ROLE PLAYED BY TRADE UNION LEADERSHIP. END SUMMARY.

2. THE RECENT RASH OF STRIKES HAS VIRTUALLY ENDED AND TUNIS HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. POSTAL, TELEGRPAH, AND TELEPHONE (PTT) WORKERS RETURNED TO THEIR JOBS AT MIDDAY MAY 11 WHILE OTHER STRIKERS AT STEEL MILL IN MENZEL BOURGUIBA AND AT SHIP REPAIR FACILITIES IN BIZERTE HAVE ALSO ENDED. WORKERS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN ENTICED BACK WITH PROMISE OF BETTER SALARIES AND THROUGH GENERAL UNION OF TUNISIAN WORKERS (UGTT) CRACK-
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DOWNSON UNION LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBLE FOR ILLEGAL STRIKE

CALLS. THROUGHOUT STRIKE TROUBLES GOT TOOK SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS TO GUARANTEE PUBLIC ORDER AND DEPLOYED POLICE RIOT SQUAD (BOP) AT KEY POINTS IN TUNIS. RUMOR OF STRIKE AT STATE GAS AND ELECTRIC COMPANY (STEG) WAS SUFFICIENT TO HAVE BOP SENT TO RING STEG FACILITY IN LA GOULETTE PORT ALTHOUGH NO STRIKE ACTUALLY DEVELOPED.

3. UGTT HAS PLAYED MOST ACTIVE PUBLIC ROLE IN STRIKE RESOLUTION WITH TOP UNION LEADERS INTERVENING IN PROBLEM AREAS AND APPARENTLY TAKING COMMAND OF SITUATION. IT HAS ENCOURAGED WORKERS TO RETURN TO JOBS AND HAS REMOVED UNION LEADERS WHO EITHER ENCOURAGED STRIKES OR FAILED TO PREVENT THEM. UGTT HAS ALSO APPARENTLY USED ITS INFLUENCE WITHIN GOT TO WIN CONCESSIONS FOR WORKERS. IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS ISSUED OVER PAST WEEK, UGTT HAS EMPHASIZED LEGITIMACY OF WORKERS DEMANDS AND BASIC RIGHT TO STRIKE BUT EXPLORED USE OF THIS TACTIC BEFORE OTHER COURSES OF ACTION EXHAUSTED. UGTT CLAIMS SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE, HAS EXPELLED THEM FROM UNION MOVEMENT AND CALLED ON DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (PSD) NOT TO HARBOR THEM EITHER.

4. MOST OF UNIVERSITY OF TUNIS APPEARS TO HAVE QUIETED DOWN IN PREPARATION FOR FINAL EXAMINATIONS, BUT UNDERLYING CAUSES OF PROBLEMS WITH STUDENTS REMAIN UNRESOLVED. WHILE SENTENCES HANDED DOWN IN MAY 10 TRIAL (SEE TUNIS 3418) WERE RELATIVELY LIGHT, STUDENTS WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPIER IF ALL ACCUSED HAD BEEN ACQUITTED. PSD SPECIAL GUARDS ON CAMPUS ARE STILL SERVING AT UNIVERSITY FACILITIES AND ARE POLES OF ATTRACTION FOR STUDENT RESENTMENT.

5. WHILE STRIKE ACTIVITY AND STUDENT TROUBLES HAVE QUIETED DOWN, PSD POLITICAL BUREAU MET MAY 12 TO CONSIDER SITUATION. ANODYNE REPORT OF MEETING IN MAY 13 PRESS NOTED TOPIC OF DISCUSSION AND THAT POLBUREAU WAS SATISFIED WITH UGTT ACTION TAKEN DURING ILLEGAL STRIKES. ACCOUNT GAVE NO INDICATION OF WHAT WE HEAR WAS A VERY ACRIMONIOUS SESSION THAT AIDED DEEP DIFFERENCES WITHIN PARTY OVER HOW STRIKES SHOULD BE HANDLED. HABIB BOURGUIBA, JR., IS REPORTED TO HAVE VICIOUSLY ATTACKED STRIKERS AND CALLED CONFIDENTIAL

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FOR ROUGH TREATMENT TO PUT END TO DISRUPTIONS.

6. AS BACKGROUND TO POLBUREAU MEETING, TUNIS HAS GENERATED WIDE-RANGING RUMORS CONCERNING ORIGINS OF STRIKES AND STUDENT TROUBLES. THESE RUN FROM SPECULATION THAT MOHAMED SAYAH IS PROVOKING DISORDERS TO UNDERMINE HABIB ACHOUR (ACHOUR HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN CIRCULATING THIS STORY AMONG TUNISIANS WHILE TELLING AMERICAN AND OTHER FOREIGN

OFFICIALS THAT SUBVERSIVES ARE AT FAULT) TO ACCUSATIONS THAT COLONEL QADHAFI IS BEHIND IT IN A PLOT TO UNDERMINE BOURGUIBA REGIME. SAYAH ATTRIBUTES TROUBLES TO RADICAL STUDENTS ON CAMPUS AND TO EX-STUDENTS WHO HAVE NOW INFILTRATED INTO UNION MOVEMENT AND ARE CONTINUING RADICAL POLITICAL ACTIVITY THERE.

7. COMMENT:

A. THE NEED TO KEEP INCOMES APACE WITH COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES WOULD APPEAR TO BE TOO SIMPLE AN EXPLANATION FOR TUNISIAN TASTES. GOT'S RESPONSE TO STRIKES APPEARS TO BE APPLYING PIECEMEAL SOLUTION THAT ADDRESSES BASIC PROBLEM, BUT MANY TUNISIANS WOULD PREFER A GLOBAL, GOVERNMENT-SET INCOME POLICY OFFERING A STABLE STANDARD OF LIVING. MOST RECOGNIZE THAT PIECEMEAL APPROACH IS ONLY ENCOURAGING MORE STRIKE ACTIVITY BY SHOWING THAT THIS IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO GET WAGE INCREASES. WHILE THE SOCIAL CLIMATE HAS QUIETED DOWN FOR THE MOMENT, MORE STRIKES CAN BE EXPECTED IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

B. RECRIMINATIONS WITHIN PSD INDICATED THAT THE PARTY'S FACTIONS AND PERSONALITIES DISAGREE PROFOUNDLY OVER CORRECT APPROACH TO STRIKE PROBLEM AND THAT TOP LEADERS ARE USING SITUATION AS BEST THEY CAN TO UNDERMINE RIVALS. FOR THE MOMENT, PSD'S EXPRESSION OF SATISFACTION WITH UGTT INDICATES THAT HABIB ACHOUR IS HOLDING HIS ENEMIES AT BAY. END COMMENT. KING

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